

Message Text

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DRAFTED BY NEA/ARN:WNHOWELL:JFC
APPROVED BY NEA/ARN - MR. DRAPER
AID - MR. RICHARDSON (DRAFT)
-----111929Z 019147 /43
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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 106886

FOR AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS:EAID, ECON, PFOR, LE, US

SUBJECT: U.S. ASSISTANCE FOR LEBANON'S HIGHWAYS

REF: A) BEIRUT 2195; B) BEIRUT 2158

1. WE HAD PLANNED DISCUSS ATALLAH'S PREFERENCE (REFTEL B) FOR EMPLOYING USG FY 78 ASSISTANCE FOR "REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE OF LEBANON'S HIGHWAY SYSTEM" DURING YOUR CONSULTATIONS LATER THIS MONTH. IN VIEW OF PRIMIN AL-HOSS'S PARTIAL ENDORSEMENT OF THIS IDEA (REFTEL A), HOWEVER, WE FEEL IT USEFUL TO CONFIRM NOW YOUR IMPRESSION, AS EXPRESSED TO ATALLAH, THAT THERE IS LITTLE ENTHUSIASM HERE FOR SUCH PROJECTS IN LEBANON OR ELSEWHERE.

2. WHILE WE LOOK FORWARD TO EXCHANGING VIEWS ON FUTURE USG ASSISTANCE TO LEBANON DURING YOUR STAY IN DEPT., YOU SHOULD BE AWARE THAT STRONG PREDISPOSITION AGAINST HIGH-
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WAY PROJECTS PREVAILS IN CONGRESS. CONGRESSMEN OTHERWISE SUPPORTIVE OF OUR AID PROGRAM IN SYRIA HAVE SPECIFICALLY CRITICIZED ROAD PROJECTS THERE. A SENSE OF CONGRESS'S POSITION RE HIGHWAYS MAY BE WRITTEN INTO AUTHORIZING LEGISLATION. FACT THAT LEBANESE ROADS WOULD BE "REPAIRED" WOULD MAKE LITTLE DIFFERENCE. IT IS DOUBTFUL, THEREFORE, THAT WE WOULD SEE USES OF USG ASSISTANCE PROPOSED BY

ATALLAH AS EITHER FEASIBLE OR DESIRABLE.

3. FOR THE RECORD, LEBANON'S HIGHWAY SYSTEM WAS IN DEPLORABLE STATE AS RESULT OF NEGLECT EVEN BEFORE RECENT STRIFE. LACK OF EVEN MINIMAL MAINTENANCE DURING CONFLICT AND, IN SOME CASES, EFFECTS OF FIGHTING (E.G., ANTI-ARMOR DITCHES DUG IN ROADS IN ALEY-KAHALE AREA) HAVE UNQUESTIONABLY ADDED TO PROBLEMS OF REPAIR. FUNDAMENTAL DIFFICULTIES, HOWEVER, WERE HISTORIC GOL INATTENTION, UNWILLINGNESS TO MAKE NEEDED EXPENDITURES OVER PAST DECADE OR MORE, AND RAMPANT CORRUPTION (E.G., TWO LANES OF BHAMDOUN BY-PASS WHICH FELL OFF THE MOUNTAIN SIDE DUE TO POOR ENGINEERING AND SKIMPING ON MATERIALS AND WERE NEVER REPAIRED DURING SEVERAL YEARS PRECEDING STRIFE). EVEN WERE THERE NOT A GENERAL QUESTIONING OF HIGHWAY ASSISTANCE PROJECTS WORLDWIDE, THESE CONSIDERATIONS WOULD MAKE US DUBIOUS OF THE VALIDITY OF ATALLAH'S PROPOSAL WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF RECONSTRUCTION ASSISTANCE.

4. IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT THE WORLD BANK, WHICH WAS INTERESTED IN HIGHWAY DEVELOPMENT IN LEBANON PRIOR TO THE RECENT EVENTS, MAY BE INCLINED TO REVIVE AT LEAST SOME OF THESE PROJECTS. CHRISTOPHER

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